

IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

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DEVELOPMENT STUDIES – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Is Openness Enough?

Hani Morsi and Alison Norwood

Abstract Openness, applied in scholarly and research practices, has garnered increasing interest in recent years. With the broadening reach of Open Access as an alternative scholarly publishing model, there is anticipation that open scholarship practices will produce desirable outcomes for research and access to knowledge. The purpose of this article is twofold: firstly to highlight that Open Access is more than just the removal of paywalls, and that it is part of a wider set of open practices that can potentially yield a more collaborative and equitable global landscape of knowledge production. Secondly, to present the *IDS Bulletin* as a case study for an Open Access publication that has evolved to adapt to a changing scholarly publishing landscape. By critiquing prevalent discourse on openness alongside this case study, we hope that this article contributes to conversations on issues at the intersection of open scholarship, collaborative research and equitable access to knowledge.

1 What do we mean when we talk about openness?

Openness, as in ‘open research’, or ‘Open Access’, covers a range of diverse scholarly, educational and knowledge communication practices that have garnered wide attention in recent years (Wiley 2006; Wiley and Hilton 2009). Practices associated with openness are often synonymous with activities taking place in electronic environments, access to which is proliferating globally at an incredibly rapid pace. Research on the role of openness generally anticipates that broadening access to knowledge will contribute significantly to promoting more equitable and effective reach and impact of research and scholarship, yet as a phenomenon associated with Internet-based technologies, open approaches to providing unrestricted access to peer-reviewed research remains a topic mired in debate. This debate raises questions about how research outputs should be disseminated and communicated more openly, and ways to fund this process. It also asks whether or not open approaches to research dissemination have universally valuable impact. Wiley and Green note that ‘only time will tell’ as to whether open practices will be truly transformative or whether it ‘will go down in the history books as just another fad that couldn’t live up to its press’ (2012: 88).

Still, openness, in the more fundamental meaning of the term as it relates to knowledge, isn't new. The wide spectrum of opportunities and technological novelty afforded by the Internet often leads to the erroneous assumption that the value of collaborative knowledge production, and the open exchange and sharing of ideas is a new feature of our modern times. Thus, perhaps a useful point of departure within the discourse on Open Access and – more broadly – open research is the fundamental distinction between provision of unrestricted access to research *outputs*, which is often what is meant when the term 'Open Access' is discussed, and adopting open approaches along the whole research process, which are the intended primary objectives of many advocates of expanding scholarly openness. All too often, contemporary debates on openness are reduced to issues of merely improving access (see Balon 2014; Liesegang 2013; Salem and Boumil 2013; Apuzzo 2013; Wolpert 2013; and Haug 2013), which is important in its own right, but opening up access to research outputs, in and of itself, is not enough for realising the oft-heralded transformative potential of modern information and communications technologies (ICTs) for knowledge production and dissemination.

1.1 Openness and the academic journal: change and continuity

Following the aforementioned distinction between making the final research accessible and opening up the various stages of the research process, it should be noted that collaborative knowledge production, as the broader objective of open research (as opposed to Open Access, which could be thought of as a subset of open research), isn't exclusive to our present time. Long before the advent of modern ICTs, scholars created networks of knowledge that traversed national borders. These networks came to be known as *republica literaria*, or Republic of Letters (Casanova 2004). The Republic of Letters was a vibrant network of Enlightenment intellectuals who created the earliest exemplification of the core ethos of openness as we understand and discuss it in the present day. Correspondence by letter was the precursor to the modern academic journal system. The academic journal, in its present day form, and as the main contemporary system of distribution of expert-vetted knowledge, is a legacy of a system that was created three and a half centuries ago. The striking irony is that the modern academic publishing system, with all the ease of copying and distribution that the Internet now provides, impedes a valuable element that simple letter correspondence offered: an unrestricted two-way interaction that created a lively, open discourse that cultivated a rich dialectic on the intellectual issues of the time.

Without a doubt, the intellectual landscape of the Age of Enlightenment was rather different from that of the Age of the Internet (as are the economic and political landscapes). Gone is the era of polymaths and the fluid boundaries between disciplines, and the increasing disciplinary specialisation of contemporary research means that a knowledge sharing and distribution system that prioritises expert academic vetting and review will simply mirror the increasing complexity of today's knowledge terrain, regardless of the degree of unrestricted access. Things have

changed significantly since the establishment of the first academic journal in the 1660s by Henry Oldenberg (Kronick 1990). With the Internet being a far superior medium for knowledge distribution than print copies, it becomes evident that the modern commercialisation of the journal system has introduced disincentives to capitalising on the immense potential afforded by Internet-based technologies, for revolutionising research collaboration and knowledge co-production in unprecedented ways. The dominant format of academic publishing is an arduously long and incredibly inefficient workflow, the output of which is often knowledge that then gets locked behind a paywall. Additionally, and aside from restricted or exorbitantly expensive access, the highly competitive nature of publishing in academic journals discourages scholars from sharing research before it achieves a final ‘publishable’ form, and thus the primary characteristic of the global ecosystem of scholarly production becomes competition, not collaboration.

1.2 Beyond the academic journal

Without a doubt, there are other factors, aside from the journal system, that also hinder the collaborative potential of research in various disciplines, including (and most notably) systemic institutional mechanisms in professional academia (Benner and Sandström 2000). Therefore, when we talk about openness, we should not limit the conversation to *access*, but also consider the ways by which knowledge that becomes open could be used in ways that capitalise on the technological possibilities of our time, as well as how the prevailing institutional mechanisms that regulate academic research enable or hinder collaboration. Research is fundamentally about discourse, but it has been malformed, primarily by the hegemony of the journal system (and by consequence of the other aforementioned factors), into a taxing process of dissertation and vetting. The contemporary academic publishing landscape creates a false logic of scarcity of ideas, which has negative implications for how new knowledge is created. Perhaps this rising awareness is what inspired the theme of the 2015 International Open Access Week, ‘Open for Collaboration’.¹

There is a palpable awareness in contemporary academia, and arguably especially in international development research, about how the ever-increasing complexity of our world requires new, or at least unconventional, approaches to creating new knowledge. There is also no shortage of innovative thinking. The problem is often that much of this thinking, and the high quality research that is often the result of it, happens in disciplinary silos. While not solely a problem of access, paywalled research and the current academic publishing system certainly exacerbates this isolation. The lack of adequate collaborative knowledge production on complex issues is largely a product of a research publishing process that discourages openness and collaboration (Nosek *et al.* 2015; Markram and Markram 2011). Alternatives to the academic journal format are emerging, and many incipient options are not just in response to the ‘oligopoly of academic publishing’ (Larivière, Haustein and Mongeon 2015) in terms of addressing the problem of

access, but also specifically recognising that the research process is about a lot more than provision of access. For example, the new Open Access journal *RIO* (*Research Ideas and Outcomes*) 'aims to catalyse change in research communication by publishing ideas, proposals and outcomes in a comprehensive way'.² Another Open Access journal, *The Winnower*,³ focuses on the whole review and publishing process, from start to finish. Moreover, institutional repositories (IRs) are becoming more pervasive, with benefits that include maximising research impact, especially in terms of the research output on the institutional level, and giving scholars more control over the process of research communication, which the conventional model of commercial publishing restricts (Chan 2004).

2 Open Access publishing

While initiatives around collaborative teaching and learning began with the introduction of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, with early Internet systems allowing comparatively open software-sharing in universities, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) from 2008 supplying both training course materials and community forums with discussion spaces for students and professors, it was only once researchers made a collective move that the concept of Open Access regarding publishing took off. It was after 2002 and the pivotal Budapest Open Access Initiative⁴ that commercial academic publishers such as Wiley, Taylor & Francis, and Elsevier, began to recognise the demand for a fundamental shift towards a more 'open' publishing model and adapted to this by bringing in Article Processing Charges (APCs). For an often not-insignificant fee (which could be as high as US\$3,000) articles would be made 'free at the point of access' and authors could offer licensing of their material to the reader with some degree of re-use of that material – with the APCs serving as compensation for the publishers for lack of revenue from subscriptions, which would, it was assumed, decline if articles were free to view online. This form of Open Access became known as the 'gold' route. However, such substantial charges led to intense debates such as those led by the UK newspaper, *The Guardian*,⁵ which recognised both opportunities and challenges offered by Open Access in its various forms, including those within the academic community – a community with obligations to publish in high-profile journals. Would this fee-paying option inevitably lead to only those authors with institutional or research programme backing being able to afford to publish? Would peer review decline if payment was perceived as the only qualification for publication? Would the whole 'author-pays' concept wind up at the dreaded end point of the previously much-vilified model of vanity publishing,⁶ unauthenticated by rigorous academic editorial processes?

Staunch Open Access advocates, such as Peter Suber (whose overview of Open Access definitions first published in 2004 still remains relevant)⁷ and Alma Swan (whose guidelines on Open Access policy partly informed the Institute of Development Studies' (IDS) own policies (Swan 2012)), were also unsatisfied with the APC model. All the time that commercial publishers applied charges for 'immediate access/gold' publication – or

their alternative option of allowing only pre-peer-reviewed article versions into IRs (known as the ‘green’ model) while imposing an embargo on full access publication on their websites for up to two years (while still ensuring income from subscribers during this embargo period) – a mixed economy operated, with continuing barriers to the reader, thereby obviating true ‘openness’. At this stage, mega-journals such as *PLOS ONE*⁸ and *BioMed Central*⁹ were created, with innovative high article volume business models resulting in comparatively lower APCs and quicker-than-traditional overall publication production times.

As Alison Jones puts it, in the *Book Machine* blog,

Scholarly publishing [...] has been in a state of disruption for decades now. The classic outputs, little changed for centuries, have been the journal articles and the monograph, and the traditional customer and curator of the content remains the university library, but the World Wide Web – originally designed for the communication of scholarly material, of course – disrupted the established print models, and publishers and academics alike have been exploring, exploiting and expanding the possibilities ever since (Jones 2015).

As educational institutions and learned societies alike began experimenting with their own new publishing business models to accommodate the complete shift required by Open Access – that the author rather than the reader pay for publication – new variants of publishing models came into play. The Outsell report on *Market Size, Share, Forecast, and Trends* (Outsell 2015) found at least 11 different models in operation, ranging from straightforward APCs, to institutional funding, to partnerships with similar organisations, to sponsorship and – in some cases – entirely voluntary staff, both contributors and editorial.

2.1 Open Access and IDS

The *IDS Bulletin* is the Institute of Development Studies’ flagship publication. Starting just two years after the Institute was founded, in 1968, the *IDS Bulletin* has been in continuous publication ever since, initially published in-house under a subscription business model, then from 2009 to 2015 co-publishing with Wiley and continuing under a subscription model, and from January 2016 as an in-house publication again, only this time under an Open Access model with articles available to freely download and re-use. These evolutions reflect the Institute’s recognition of the necessity of changing with the publishing landscape, of aiming for wider reach and impact when signing with Wiley, and then with further ambitions to continue this reach while still fulfilling emerging funder and reader demands as an Open Access journal today. The co-author, Alison Norwood, has worked in the IDS Communications Unit since 2000 and has been directly involved in both the move to and away from commercial publishing in the intervening 15 years.

The *IDS Bulletin*’s purpose has always been to reflect IDS’ and its partner organisations’ cutting edge research within development,

focusing on both academic and policy-oriented pieces, many of which are co-written by Southern partners, benefiting from their lived experiences and knowledge sharing. Since 2010, 46 per cent of *IDS Bulletin* articles have been written by Southern contributors, and the ongoing aim is to increase this percentage still further in the future.

When considering the next steps for the *IDS Bulletin* once reaching the end of the Wiley contract in late 2015, it could not be assumed that contributors – wherever in the world they were based – could afford substantial APCs. During the last two years of the Wiley contract, the opposing mandates from IDS' funders to produce gold Open Access material diametrically conflicted with the authors' ability to pay the APCs which Wiley would have required to achieve this access. Add to this the royalties received by IDS from Wiley's subscription model (which covered editorial staffing and production costs of the *IDS Bulletin* and that of some other Institutional series publications), and the potential financial hole that would result if the Institute withdrew from this commercial model, and it was clear that IDS had to reflect seriously on how to keep all the stakeholders happy while still meeting the growing imperatives of Open Access publishing principles. That is, producing articles free at the point of publication for both downloading and re-using through the various Creative Commons licensing options – which by this point had become the chief form of open licensing.¹⁰

How IDS communicates its research findings and their resulting impact has long been a core element of IDS' strategic plan, and as early as 2010 IDS had launched its own green Open Access route through the creation of OpenDocs,¹¹ the official institutional repository designed to hold versions of IDS authors' and partner research centres' and consortia's literature works. Working closely with Southern partners, just two years later the BLDS Digital Library¹² was also launched, containing digitised library holdings available under a Creative Commons licence, on behalf of research organisations in Africa and Asia. However, even this strong Open Access base could not encompass the articles in the *IDS Bulletin*, which – while still under contract with Wiley – would remain behind a paywall and without licensing allowing any open re-use. Any pre-peer-reviewed articles downloaded into OpenDocs to meet green Open Access conditions were still considered insufficient by IDS' funders. It was apparent, therefore, that none of the existing fledgling experimental open journal models suited the *IDS Bulletin*.

In 2012 the Finch Report, on expanding access to published tax-payer-funded research findings, mandated gold Open Access in the UK and thus finally set in motion a sequence of discussion and decision-making across both the publishing and academic sectors (Finch Group 2012). The co-author attended a whole series of events around these Open Access debates, including 'Implementing Finch' in November 2012, 'Open Access, A Scientific Revolution for Southern Countries?' and 'The Future for Open Access and the Move Towards Open Data' in March 2015, and 'The Next Steps for Open Access in Higher Education'

in January 2016. These events ranged initially from the purely *theoretical* prospect of increasing gold openness, towards the acknowledgement that openness was *inevitable* and not only for the final published literature results in journal article format, but also the *underlying data* behind the research results, and – as a new trend – academic monographs too.¹³

After three years of debate within IDS following on from the Finch Report, on the appropriateness of various Open Access business models, the only acceptable conclusion for the *IDS Bulletin*'s continued success of its chosen special issue-themed concept was publishing as a gold Open Access journal in-house at the natural and amicable end of the Wiley contract arrangement.

These internal debates have been inclusive of many areas of existing expertise within the Institute – from the Communications Unit's perspective of years of combined publishing experience, to the library team's extensive knowledge of setting up the two IRs mentioned above, to the Research Fellows' experience from years of publishing through high prestige (albeit commercial) publishers. The following business models were considered: continued publication with Wiley on the existing arrangement of Open Access only possible through APCs; a hybrid model with Wiley, whereby some articles would be Open Access through payment but other articles would remain behind a paywall through the subscription model; options offered by other commercial publishers whose Open Access charges might be slightly less prohibitive; and the initially daunting prospect of publishing in-house again.

While IDS had published the *IDS Bulletin* in-house prior to the Wiley arrangement, the new publishing landscape was vastly different to those pre-commercial-contract years. In addition, the lack of royalties from any kind of subscription model could only result in an imbalance of the books regarding essential expenditure on the editorial processes required to produce each issue. This led to the early conclusion that sponsorship and/or advertising, combined with some Institutional or research project funding, would be the means to enable survival of the journal initially – with the forward-looking strategic plan to grow a new open online resource¹⁴ available to all, while retaining and increasing the necessarily strict peer review and editorial processes already firmly established.

Even once the decision had been made to produce the journal under sole IDS publication and offer articles as freely downloadable without embargo, the next set of decisions fell to choosing the most appropriate suite of Creative Commons (CC) licensing options to suit both IDS funder requirements and author preferences. After a year to make the initial business model decision, the specific licensing requirements for the relaunched online version of the journal then took another year to clarify. While Open Access advocates both institutionally and more widely would always claim that the most liberal CC BY licence is the only acceptable open route, others – whether academic or publishing-focused – have concerns about potential misuse of material offered by

such a broad disclaimer.¹⁵ Some instances, if rare, of re-used material being taken out of the originally intended context and being politically misrepresented, or articles being repackaged into new compilations for large commercial sums (such as educational textbooks compiling open content and reselling for up to US\$100) meant that the Institute decided to recommend two non-commercial publication options as well – CC BY-NC,¹⁶ and the most prohibitive licence, CC BY-NC-ND.¹⁷

2.2 Future aims of the new, open *IDS Bulletin*

The demonstrable impact of *IDS Bulletin* articles is a key part of driving the journal forward, and increased availability through the gold Open Access model is an assumed advantage towards reaching both established and new audiences more quickly. The *IDS Bulletin*'s usage (amount of article downloads) was already very healthy¹⁸ under Wiley's influence and will continue to grow under sole IDS publication through existing IDS networks and far-reaching social media connections. Fast turnaround issues with short lead-in times, such as that on the Arab Spring (Tadros 2011), ensure that IDS' research thinking is available for public viewing in months rather than years.

Collaboration with Southern partners also continues to be an important indicator, building on past successes of issues with significant media attention¹⁹ generated by the then-IDS director with co-editors from the Aga Khan University and the Collective for Social Science Research (both based in Karachi) on undernutrition in Pakistan (Haddad, Bhutta and Gazdar 2013) and with Oxfam on food justice in India (Haddad, Chandrasekhar and Swain 2012). The latter issue was specifically commissioned to coincide with, and influence, the National Food Security Bill which was working its way through the Indian parliament at the time.

The move towards a gold Open Access model funded in large part by sponsorship or fundraising is a comparatively bold one, reliant on meeting success criteria for both readers and research funders alike. It is hoped that by making articles available to both freely access and re-use, and by continued encouragement of contributions by Southern partners, the unique nature of the *IDS Bulletin* will continue in its special issue format for many years to come. The aim is for the journal to become known as an outlet for collaborative working between IDS and its partner organisations, encouraging debate between contributors in different countries and with potentially different viewpoints on any given theme. In addition, by building on 48 years of archive material, the new *IDS Bulletin* web resource platform will offer additional special-themed issues combining the republishing of older but still significant articles with new commentaries on the current state of the debate to bring the evolution of ideas and discussion into fresh focus. As the in-house model develops its own monitoring and evaluation statistics and translates these into impact stories for both readers and authors, careful recording of any increases in download or citation figures will be undertaken, in order to build on successful articles and encourage further contributions for impactful and collaborative future issues.

3 Conclusion: charting the future of open and collaborative research

If the success of the Open Access movement in the past several years is a sign of things to come, then it should be expected that there will be a rising tide of change in the global landscape of knowledge and scholarly communication. Despite the lack of strong correlation between a journal's Open Access status and its impact (Davis 2006; Davis and Fromerth 2007; Gargouri *et al.* 2010; Moed 2007), what is more evident is that 'wherever there are subscription-based constraints on accessibility, providing Open Access will increase the usage and citation of the more useable and citeable papers' (Gargouri *et al.* 2010: 18). As a result, some scholars expect that such Open Access-driven increase in usage may lead to research that is characterised by greater reach and impact on a global scale (Getz 2005: 19). Looking forward, the volume and quality of openly accessible content will be on the rise as research communities, institutions and various disciplines respond and contribute to the emerging landscape of Open Access research, but provision of unrestricted access is only the start of a true transformation in how knowledge is created, shared and communicated. The demand for more openness is indeed driven significantly by a growing realisation that truly collaborative modes of knowledge production must be created by opening up the various stages, tools and outputs of the research process, culminating in unrestricted access to and communication of research. As policy frameworks for openness emerge in response to this demand, openness will proliferate more widely (on the global and the disciplinary axes) as well as deeply (along the whole research process), but along with this proliferation comes new challenges. Disparate policy responses mean that the often varying Open Access institutional requirements can present new limits on the collaborative potential that would be facilitated by such increasing reach of Open Access research. Therefore, as highlighted in the case of the *IDS Bulletin* discussed in this article, formulating an institutional Open Access policy needs to account appropriately for responding to the changing scholarly publishing landscape, the demands of producing research that responds to critical issues in a timely manner, as well as ways to further enable and improve collaborative knowledge production with research partners.

With all the possibilities for radically transforming research collaboration and knowledge sharing that Internet-based technologies offer, limiting the discourse on openness to issues of access will restrict the horizon of these possibilities to provision of access, which is – essentially – a legacy of a publishing business model that created value and made sense in a world that predates the Internet. The Open Access movement is much wider than the removal of paywalls. The discourse on openness should include conversations on what openness means when it comes to collaboration on quality research that focuses on the world's most pressing issues, and the ways in which the current academic publishing format, as well as current institutional mechanisms of funding research, enable or hinder this potential.

A publication process that causes important research to get stuck in what is often a painfully long review process does not contribute to a

vision of what open and collaborative research could look like. This is also true for a process that doesn't account for the fact that research in its formative stages can make equally important contributions, and that getting the final outputs in 'publishable' format should not always be the endgame of research communication. The conversation on access to research should also include other aspects of the political and moral economy of knowledge that characterise today's technology-driven world. In considering issues that go beyond opening up access to research outputs, we can advance the questions currently being raised about how research is created, published and shared to be more inclusive of a broader global knowledge agenda. Regarding the transition in academic publishing from print to digital and from restricted to open (in all its various flavours), the Open Access model is the first step towards truly transformative thinking in knowledge co-production and sharing, and is only the conversation starter on what the future of knowledge looks like in this increasingly complex and connected world.

Notes

- 1 Open Access Week is an annual global scholarly communication event focusing on open access and related topics. It takes place during the last week of October in a multitude of locations both on- and offline. The theme for Open Access Week 2015 was 'Open for Collaboration'.
- 2 <http://riojournal.com/about>.
- 3 <https://thewinnower.com/about>.
- 4 For original statement see www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read. Ten years on (in 2012) a coalition of scientists, foundations, libraries, universities and Open Access advocates updated new recommendations with the intended purpose of increasing openness of research in order to usher in huge advances in the sciences, medicine and health (see www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org).
- 5 www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2012/aug/10/uk-open-access-research-debate-round-up.
- 6 A model whereby any author could publish without any quality criteria being applied.
- 7 <http://legacy.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/overview.htm>.
- 8 www.plosone.org.
- 9 www.biomedcentral.com.
- 10 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses>.
- 11 <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs>.
- 12 <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/3>.
- 13 Monographs are defined as detailed written studies of a single specialised subject or an aspect of that subject; and as such were initially considered too lengthy and resource-consuming to be produced with an author-pays model. However, at the time of writing momentum is currently building towards changing monograph business models too, with seminars such as 'Alternatives to the Monograph' being held at the University of Sussex, UK, in November 2015 during Academic Book Week, and attended by the co-author.
- 14 <http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/index>.
- 15 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>.

- 16 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>.
 17 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>.
 18 According to Wiley Publisher Reports, against similar journals within the development genre.
 19 www.dawn.com/news/1049431/investing-in-nutrition.

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